Masanobu Endo x Shigeru Miyamoto - 1986 Developer Interview

This delightful little interview first appeared in the 2/86 issue of Famimaga. At the time Endo was riding high on the success of Tower of Druaga and Xevious, and while his impact and popularity has largely gone unappreciated in the West, Miyamoto pays him due respect as the elder, senior personage. Endo, for his part, seems duly impressed by Miyamoto's rising star and the impact of Super Mario Bros, in particular.

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Endo: I have to say, there's no two ways about it, Super Mario Bros was the most interesting game last year. It's no contest.

Miyamoto: Well, I'm a big fan of Xevious and Tower of Druaga myself. We had them bring an arcade cabinet to our office, and I played Tower of Druaga on it. But I couldn't get past floor 60... I got sent back to floor 14 and couldn't end up finishing it. Still though, the maze programming is excellent, as I've come to expect of Namco. It's impressively well-made.

Endo: Actually, you know, we had originally planned to have 256 floors. But we thought that would be too hard for players, so we decided to make it the same height as the tallest building in Japan, sixty floors.

Miyamoto: I see. How philosophical...!

Endo: Hah, no, my generation, the "Gundam Generation", we love to make up stupid reasons for every choice we make. Even if it's a lie. (laughs) Actually, there's an employee of ours named Akira who's always breaking things, and we gave him the nickname "Bakira".**1** I named the "Bacula" enemies in Xevious after him! That's my style.

Miyamoto: Another recent game that left a big impression on me is Lode Runner. The first time I saw the Apple version, I thought it was just an American knock-off of Donkey Kong or something. But on closer look, my interest was piqued--it's actually an incredibly fresh, novel game.

It's kind of old now, but I love Donkey Kong JR Math. I always want

Miyamoto: It's a simple game, but it turns into a real rip-roaring good time when you play it with 2 players. It's super popular among the staff at Nintendo, too.

Beer, sukiyaki, and two legends of gaming.

Endo: Also Wrecking Crew, that game feels great. The graphics are so pretty. And who knew Mario was so strong. I love Mario.

Miyamoto: When we made Donkey Kong, I dubbed Mario "Mister Video", and I told everyone how I want him to be used in Nintendo games for many, many years to come. You know, I struggled a bit with his design. In order to show his nose better I gave him a mustache, and to make his running animation easier to understand, I gave him those overalls...

Miyamoto: That's why when Super Mario Bros. came out, I felt like my original wish, that Mario would keep getting used in Nintendo games, had been granted.

Endo: By the way, when I visited America, people asked me "what do you do?", and when I described my work, they said "Oh, so you're a game designer then." It was the first time I'd heard that expression, but when I asked what the words meant, it definitely fit what I do.

Miyamoto: I went to America too, about three years ago, and I introduced myself saying "I'm a game designer." They replied to me, "That's weird, you're way too young!" But then I explained what I'm doing, and they admitted, "Yeah, you are a game designer."

Endo: To me, making video games feels exactly like making a movie.

Miyamoto: There's a President of a certain game company I know, who has been saying the same thing ever since he started his company. "These are movies."

Endo: I mean, you have to think of a "screenplay" for your game, and you have to "direct" the way characters move. I'm a proponent of small teams, so I also do the programming myself sometimes, or sometimes I control the creative activities of staff like other programmers or designers. Look at George Lucas and the Star Wars series... he didn't direct the later ones himself, yet we still definitely call them Lucas' movies, right? He's the one in control. I think making a game is the same way. Or I guess you could say, it's like being a director.

when the programmer was stuck, for instance, I would offer suggestions, "why not try it this way?" So in that sense, I think it's a problem if one doesn't understand programming at all.
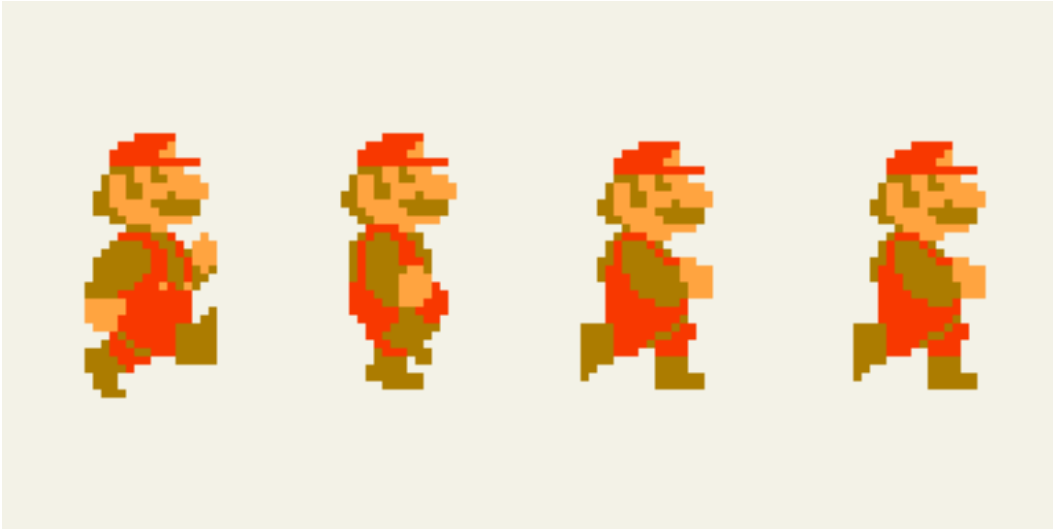
It's fascinating to consider how Mario's iconic design was largely dictated by practical concerns of sprite legibility (and how differently it might have played out if Miyamoto had chosen a different solution to that problem).

Endo: When a programmer tells me "I can't do that" I say "Liar!" and then run off to program it myself, then I show them. "See, it is possible! No slacking off now!" (laughs) I only do that with those who have sufficient willpower though. In most other cases, I have a lighter touch. "You can do it, right...? Please, please! Just try!" (laughs)

Miyamoto: That's a common situation.
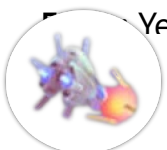
Yeah, I almost always end up having to cajole them.

goes on there are lots of small details we update. So they say about me, "Hey... if you work with Miyamoto, you'll never know when you're done. Watch out, you'll find yourself overloaded with a mountain of work at the end!"

Endo: Game designers, they're optimistic people... or to put it more negatively, they can be like "it's all good!" to an almost irresponsible degree. I've had programmers get real mad at me too, like the time in Tower Druaga, when I said that I wanted the player to be able to defend with his shield even when his sword is drawn. I finally convinced them after much pleading. "Put it in, put it in, it'll be cool! It'll look good! *Put. it. in!!!*"

Miyamoto: When we were young, everyone admired TV directors, and you used to see questions like "What should I study to be a director?" published all the time in magazines. The answer was always, "Try a variety of things. It doesn't matter what, just join a TV studio, and if the chance is there things will happen." I feel like those words apply perfectly to aspiring game designers too.

Endo: I think the people suited for game development are people who are versatile, who can do anything. That and being curious.

Miyamoto: In the past, when I had free time, I'd go to pachinko or play live music. I love this genre called bluegrass, it's like American Enka or something.

Endo: Whoa, that's cool. That's really awesome. I spend most of my free time playing an instrument, watching TV or movies, or reading. I'm obsessed with anime too, but we shouldn't talk about that because I'll
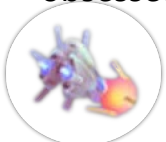
Miyamoto: I've never ridden one. In fact I made Excitebike without ever riding a bike... what'd you think of it?

Endo: It was fun. I love the way you go flying when you pitch forward off the bike.

Miyamoto: That little touch came from my experiences skiing. I like to ski.

Endo: When you pursue a lot of different hobbies, you can feel things you wouldn't experience in normal everyday life. You know what I mean? I think that's somehow connected to the process of making games.

Miyamoto: Yeah. When I use my head in a new way, it stimulates my creativity.

Endo: Recently I've found meeting new people to be very stimulating too. For example, I was talking with a movie stuntman, and it made me feel, in my imagination, like I'd had the experience of being a stuntman myself.

Miyamoto: I'm very much looking forward to see what games the next generation creates. The generation of players in the game centers today.

Endo: I am VERY excited about that too. That's another reason for us to do our best now and create good games, to leave the world of gaming in a better, more pleasant place for the next generation.

Miyamoto: Yeah, the one thing I don't want to do is make a bad game that people regret buying. I don't to waste these kids' hard-earned allowance!

By the way, lately I've been obsessed with Kinnikuman. I can't stop

adventure and role-playing games. Games using the Famicom Disk System.

Miyamoto: Yeah, it'll be easier to port those computer games to the Famicom Disk System.

Endo: It's going to make all sorts of things possible that we couldn't do on carts. What new wonders will we see…!? That's my theme for 1986.

Miyamoto: It has enhanced sound capabilities too, and the price will be cheaper… honestly, I feel like I can't quite predict what kind of worlds it will reveal for us. Perhaps we will see a brand new type of game, something no one has ever seen before…

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